

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

Stakeholder Conference:  
“The European Voluntary  
Humanitarian Aid Corps - state of  
play and next steps”

Budapest, 17 June 2011

prepared for:



### **EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate - General for Humanitarian  
Aid and Civil Protection – DG ECHO

and on behalf of:



### **DOWNTOWN EUROPE**

Professional Congress Organisers  
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# **1 Executive Summary**

## **Background**

The Lisbon Treaty foresees the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (Humanitarian Aid Corps), Art 214.5 TFEU. A Communication presenting the main principles and options has been adopted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November<sup>1</sup>.

As important steps forward in the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps, the Communication suggested the implementation of pilot projects in order to test different options for the involvement of volunteers. One key feature of the present stakeholder conference in Budapest was the launch of these pilot projects.

In the context of the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps, stakeholder involvement and a collaborative approach for gathering ideas and opinions was set up from the beginning. These consultations included:

- Intense consultation of stakeholders via interview and surveys during the Review on the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps (July – September 2010)
- Initial stakeholder conference in Brussels on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010
- Open Public Consultation (February until May 2011)

During the stakeholder conference in Budapest, the results of this intense process of consulting stakeholders / sector actors were summarised and presented.

Additionally, the conference used participative sessions to gather ideas and suggestions from stakeholders for the next steps in establishing the Humanitarian Aid Corps.

## **Facts and features of the conference**

At the invitation of DG ECHO, and under the auspices of the Hungarian Presidency, 97 participants gathered in Budapest on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2011. The conference attracted representatives from NGOs, governments, UN organisations and the Red Cross, Universities, and other organisations to participate and to contribute with their ideas and opinions. The participants represented organisations from all over the EU with strong participation from Hungarian organisations, and one representative from India (represented at the conference: UNV, government officials from Hungary, Poland, Greece, France, Bulgaria, Germany, organisations / volunteers from India, Papua-New Guinea, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Sweden, Portugal, UK, Ireland, and Romania – for details please see the list of participants in annex II).

In order to stimulate a productive exchange, the conference employed a “mixed method” approach involving presentations as well as interactive and collaborative sessions (dialogue café). The programme consisted of:

- Speech of the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Ms Kristalina Georgieva
- Speech of the Hungarian Minister of State for European Affairs, Ms Enikő Györi
- Presentation of the pilot projects
- Official launch of the pilot projects
- Field feedback panel discussion
- Presentation of the results of the Open Public Consultation
- Dialogue Café information exchange and harvesting of ideas and opinions
- Vision workshop “How to brand the Corps”
- Conclusion by the Hungarian Deputy State Secretary for Global Affairs, Mr Jonas Hóvári

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<sup>1</sup> Communication of the Commission - COM(2010)683 final

The conference took place at the István Károlyi Conference Center in Budapest on the 17th of June 2011 and the logistics were handled by the professional conference organiser DOWNTOWN EUROPE from Brussels. DG ECHO has conducted a brief survey (web-based) amongst the conference participants. The results show a generally high degree of satisfaction. Over 90% of the responding participants stated to be overall satisfied or very satisfied with the conference (for details please see annex VII). A video, which reports on the conference, can be found on the internet (Conference video on youtube website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWjCDqtaF0> ).

## **Summary findings**

The Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Ms Kristalina Georgieva assured participants of her full support for the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps. She stressed the importance of the Corps for enhancing solidarity, and strengthening volunteering and humanitarian action. The design phase of the Corps, she said, was relying heavily on the pilot projects for the learning they would offer.

Participants at the conference pointed out several issues which would need further elaboration and study during the establishment process of the Humanitarian Aid Corps. These included a future structure for managing the Corps, and the systems and standards for selecting, training, deploying and managing the volunteers. The pilot projects were applauded with respect to their general approach and as a way of testing many aspects of involving volunteers in the humanitarian aid actions of the European Union.

Some debates from previous consultations look to have been resolved: a sustainable partnership with a local community, which build local capacities, was more of a priority than the volunteer experience; a volunteer's age was less a determinant of a successful volunteer than attitude and, to a lesser degree, experience; Humanitarian Aid Corps volunteers will receive compensation and can be deployed in preparedness, DRR and transition situations; there will need to be some form of body providing coherence to the initiative. Some 'how's remain to be resolved and DG ECHO will move these forward following the pilot projects: content and accreditation of training, management standards, logistical issues such as visas, etc.

Aside from the obvious benefits to communities in crisis-affected countries, and to European solidarity, it was pointed out that the Humanitarian Aid Corps would contribute to improvements in the humanitarian sector itself: establishing in the minds of humanitarian actors that they develop people for the sector and not just for their own agency, taking forward the professionalisation agenda, developing the next cadre of humanitarian workers, and leaders to manage the ever-increasing number of crises.

Overall there were suggestions for improvements expressed by volunteers and organisational participants but the messages of support for the Humanitarian Aid Corps were unanimous, from the Commissioner, the Hungarian Secretary of State, 7 volunteers brought together by DG ECHO for the event, several Permanent Delegations and the speakers.

Finally, the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps was seen as a great opportunity for Europeans to assist people in need, to show solidarity and to practise active European citizenship.

## **Next steps**

DG ECHO had come to the conference recognising that Brussels did not have all the answers and it was recognised there was work to be done in 4 particular areas:

DG ECHO will consider the suggestions for a new brand name for the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (the acronym EVHAC is recognised as not being an acceptable brand name) and let participants know as early as possible so volunteers departing on the pilot schemes know the name of the initiative they are working for.

Although the Council has agreed that the Humanitarian Aid Corps should not encroach upon existing budget for humanitarian aid and civil protection, the negotiations will be hard and the support of member states will be important. Representatives from the German and French Permanent Representations expressed their support for the Humanitarian Aid Corps at the conference.

Regarding coherence there was a strong suggestion to standardise areas like benefits and terms now, leaving management standards and training to after the pilot projects. Also, could an on-line community be established to facilitate learning and ensure that returning volunteers remain engaged in the Humanitarian Aid Corps as advocates?

Further formal steps in support of the preparation of the Regulation for the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps will be taken. These steps include the conduction of a formal impact assessment and an adjacent thorough cost-benefit analysis to be conducted during the next months.

## 2 Sessions and key issues addressed

The sessions of the conference proceeded in line with the conference agenda (see annex I). The following chapters describe the key issues addressed during the conference. Further details such as the list of participants, the presentation of the key speakers and the results of the Dialogue Café sessions can be found in the annex to this report.

### 2.1 Welcome and opening speeches



Ms Enikő Györi, Hungary's Minister of State for EU Affairs welcomed participants and stressed the benefits brought to humankind through voluntarism. She stated that the Humanitarian Aid Corps initiative was important because it shows European values and it enhances capacities to deal with crises: **'a strong Europe needs a personal touch'**. The Hungarian Presidency had seen the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps as 'a key priority', an important part of the European Year of Volunteering (2011)



The EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Ms Kristalina Georgieva, emphasised how DG ECHO had consulted openly and listened to views and recommendations. The key messages had been learnt: for example, the Humanitarian Aid Corps shouldn't duplicate existing volunteering mechanisms, it must be demand-driven, it must build local capacity, it must enhance the sector's professionalism while also ensuring social inclusion. The three key components of a successful Humanitarian Aid Corps would lie in the selection of the volunteers, the training which will ensure the volunteer is effective, and the deployment of the volunteers. She thanked

the Hungarian presidency for keeping the Humanitarian Aid Corps on the agenda and emphasised that **'what we start now is a long road to travel'**.

The pilot projects being launched today would show how volunteering brings value to Europe and the learning from them will provide ECHO with the design features for the future of the Humanitarian Aid Corps. The Commissioner warned the pilot projects that expectations were high!

The question and answer session, following the speeches, saw several very supportive statements and agreement to the approach applied by the Commission. One critical issue addressed was the question of funding (the corps should not reduce the existing humanitarian and civil protection budget). The Commissioner informed the audience that in a Council Conclusion of 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011<sup>2</sup>, the member states

<sup>2</sup> Council Conclusion on the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, 17 May 2011, Brussels, Article 7: "The Council underlines that EVHAC should not encroach upon the Commission's existing humanitarian aid and civil protection budget and that it should be set-up based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis" (see annex VI for the full text).

agreed that the Humanitarian Aid Corps should not encroach upon existing budget for humanitarian aid and civil protection.

## 2.2 Dialogue café sessions



Markus Held, the focal point for the development of the Humanitarian Aid Corps situated in DG ECHO, facilitated a dialogue café asking the following questions:

- **Why did I choose to be here today and what do I want to get out of this conference?**
- **What main lessons learnt from your experience in humanitarian aid and/or volunteering would you like to share?**

As he noted: 'We haven't come from Brussels with all the answers'. An analysis of the participants' written answers<sup>3</sup> revealed the following:

**Motivation of participants:** The representatives participating at the conference expected to gain first hand information on the current state of play with regard to the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps. Another important aspect frequently mentioned was active networking and the opportunity to exchange with other sector actors on humanitarian volunteering and its opportunities.

**Lessons learned (from own experience with humanitarian aid and/or volunteering):** Recognising that much volunteering is local, the participants stressed the importance of respecting the local communities (in affected regions) when involving international volunteers, and consequently the importance of the task of developing capacity at local level.

Next to the important issues of training, mission preparation and a professional approach when involving volunteers, one core issue identified was the need for a proper volunteer management system in place when involving volunteers in host countries (being able to cope with the specific challenges of involving volunteers). Some often-expressed concerns and conditions for the involvement of volunteers in humanitarian actions re-emerged, which include: only demand driven operations, no negative impact on the professionalisation of the sector, adequate training and preparation as a must, aid worker security as mandatory, a requirement for mutual benefit for volunteers and hosting organisations (and communities) etc.

The comments of the participants aligned closely with what has already been addressed in the Communication of the Commission and confirmed in the Council Conclusion of the European Union (see annex VI).

<sup>3</sup> The transcribed information harvesting sheets of the participants are provided in annex V of this report.

## 2.3 Introduction of pilot projects



The three pilot projects were introduced. Full details of each can be found in annex IV of this report. Ms Henrike Trautmann, Head of Unit at DG ECHO, introduced the pilot projects by saying that ECHO had wanted to spread the projects as wide as possible, particularly to ensure that learning was received on three key areas: selection, training and deployment.

There were themes common to all of the projects. First that the main aim was to help in humanitarian projects, through partners; second to equip the right volunteers with necessary training and experience, and a coach.

Also, each was looking to ensure that the volunteers could become professionals, part of the talent pool with a career in the humanitarian sector.



Save the Children and NOHA emphasised that their project, to be undertaken with Bioforce, was 'imaginative'. It brought together the academic rigour of NOHA, the accreditation experience of Bioforce and the deployment and training experience of Save the Children. An offer appreciated by the conference participants was that their project could place volunteers, including funds, with other organisations.



The French and Bulgarian Red Cross Societies focussed closely on the benefits to the partner Societies, intending not just to ensure they could report added value after the volunteer had returned but also to offer key learning on partnerships to the Humanitarian Aid Corps.



VSO and Provobis offered a strong focus on volunteer management standards, opportunities for working in early recovery and preparedness and formal recognition for the volunteers' work from a university.

In the discussion following the presentation of pilot projects, the participants stressed issues such as the importance of having clear selection criteria for candidates, especially around values, and that the projects involving young professionals should have a close look at the possibility of offering employment opportunities when the volunteers have finished their assignments. One respondent highlighted the opportunity for the sector to develop "humanitarian leaders for the future" through the volunteering programmes which were presented.



## 2.4 Reactions from the field



ECHO had brought together a number of volunteers to comment on the pilot projects and offer learning from their own experience. Facilitated by Markus Held, they offered some suggestions for the Humanitarian Aid Corps as well as some caveats, on areas such as what value volunteers add to local capacities, and which challenges arise from involving volunteers and what activities they should do. On the latter point, despite several attempts from Mr Held to elicit answers, the only specific activities mentioned were monitoring & evaluation and needs assessment – clearly some clarification on these needs to be part of the learning from pilot projects.

The presented ideas included:

- The use of the Humanitarian Aid Corps volunteers both to train their own successors and to establish sustainable volunteer schemes in the communities where they work.
- The critical importance of cultural awareness of volunteers. There was a wider discussion about the need to select volunteers based on their values.
- The need for investing in coaches / coaching, contributing to well functioning volunteer management systems.
- Volunteers need to understand that success is often down to interaction with others
- The need to find a way to measure the contribution of volunteers to the project.

The caveats highlighted were:

- Smaller organisations will have difficulty identifying people and projects, and following standards.
- Agencies need to avoid any semblance of ‘disaster tourism’.
- The importance of the host organisation in giving a structure to the volunteer.
- Agencies need to be sure that their local staff are not or do not feel worse treated than the Humanitarian Aid Corps volunteers who are being paid, coached and given a career path.
- Coordination of the Humanitarian Aid Corps in post-disaster countries, such as Haiti, is important.

## 2.5 Voices from stakeholders – Open Public Consultation



In a session, chaired by Mr Encho Gospodinow, the special advisor to the Commissioner<sup>4</sup>, the consultants who had undertaken the review in September 2010 and the open public consultation in March 2011 (Mr Michael Kunze, of Germax, and Jonathan Potter, of People In Aid) summarised their work. The consultation results are published in form of a factual report on DG ECHO's website<sup>5</sup>.

They presented lists of recommendations and issues which had emerged in the review and at the conference in Brussels, September 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Mr Encho Gospodinow, special advisor to the Commissioner Dr. Kristalina Georgieva responsible for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response

<sup>5</sup> Link to the report on the open public consultation: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/evhac\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/evhac_en.htm)



The great majority had been captured by DG ECHO in the Communication on the establishment of the Humanitarian Aid Corps, and would therefore be part of the legal basis for a future Corps. ECHO's careful selection of the pilot projects had ensured many others would be addressed.

What remained to be considered were often issues which would be handled through a mechanism or body, perhaps coordinated by DG ECHO. They included facilitative needs for the Humanitarian Aid Corps such as a volunteer database or roster; how visas are gained, common insurance and the legal basis for volunteering in different EU states; what levels of compensation would be paid to the volunteers; how would a Corps volunteer know s/he was an Humanitarian Voluntary Corps volunteer; and what coherence would there be between projects?

## 2.6 Vision workshop



Markus Held then led a session on the Humanitarian Voluntary Corps brand. The papers handed in by participants showed a variety of messages which they felt described the Corps. The questions guiding this session were:

- **What are the main messages that we would like to convey with the European Humanitarian Aid Corps?**
- **Based on the main messages – What brand should the programme have? Please choose then the most attractive one of your table for the final voting.**

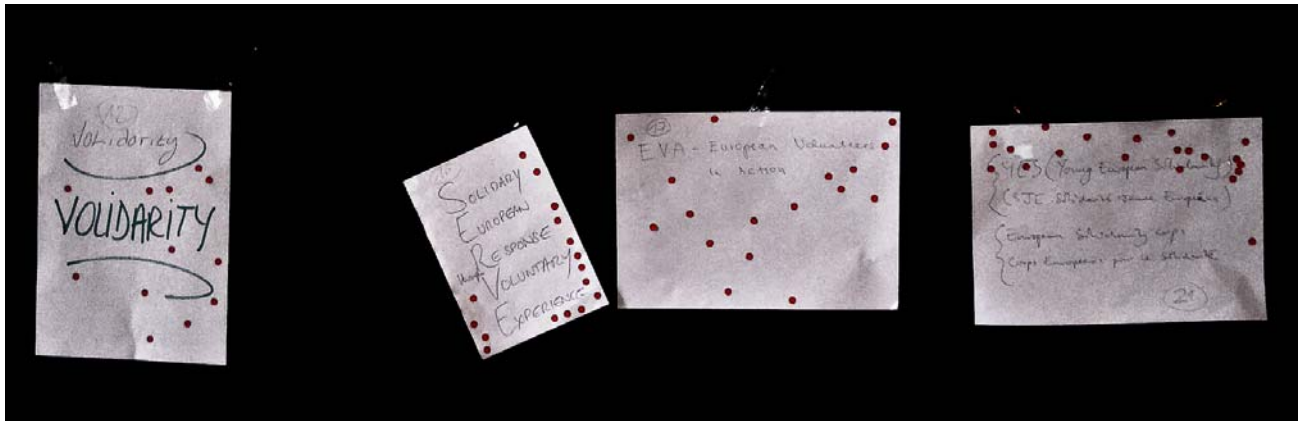
**Main messages:** some messages were about the volunteers themselves (e.g. professionalisation), some were about European volunteers helping communities (solidarity), some covered partnership between volunteers and communities (e.g. understanding difference, exchanging values and skills), and others offered the communities' perspective (e.g. Europe cares, strengthen local capacities). A few messages are presented hereunder as examples:

- Experience – professionalism
- Recognition
- Value-added
- Give your hand and heart
- Support people in need
- Invest in building tomorrow's humanitarian leadership
- Europe cares – you can make a difference
- Strengthen local volunteers, mobilisation and management
- EC aid is not just a transfer of money but person to person engagement and solidarity.

The full listing of the suggested messages can be found in annex V of the report.

**An attractive brand name:** groups of participants converted the messages into suggestions for a new name for the Humanitarian Aid Corps as the former acronym (EVHAC for European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps) is recognised to be inappropriate.

The four most often selected brands are the following:



Suggested brands and number of votes received:

- YES – Young European Solidarity (21 votes)
- EVA – European Volunteers in Action (17 votes)
- SERVE – Solidary European through Response Voluntary Expertise (16 votes)
- Volidarity (12 votes)

The conference was not the place to take any decision on the future name of the Corps, but the Commission will use the presented ideas for the branding as inspiration when developing the future “brand name” of the Humanitarian Aid Corps.

## 2.7 Closing remarks

The closing remarks from Ms Henrike Trautmann and Mr János Hóvári, Deputy Secretary of State for Global Affairs in the Hungarian Presidency looked at the actual and hoped-for next steps. Ms Trautmann praised the creativity of presenters and participants throughout the conference and noted that, because of the Humanitarian Aid Corps, DG ECHO was part of the European Year of Volunteering as it committed to improving conditions for volunteers in the Community. Mr Hóvári stressed the added value the Humanitarian Aid Corps would have in building capacity and in the way in which **‘the mutual solidarity of young people can help in crises’**. The Humanitarian Aid Corps, he concluded, would be an example of **‘the lasting effects of solidarity’**.